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State Purchases 900 Acres for Conservation in the Berkshires  
Sandisfield Land Deal is Commonwealth's Largest Land Purchase Since 2002 and First  
Acquisition of Old Growth Forest in Over 20 Years

BOSTON – Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs Ian Bowles today announced the Commonwealth's largest conservation land purchase in more than five years - a 900-acre parcel in the southern Berkshires harboring eastern hemlock trees that sprouted before the Pilgrims sailed. This successful acquisition is due in large part to a longstanding public-private partnership between the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and Mass Audubon.

The \$5.2 million Spectacle Pond Farm purchase includes an eastern hemlock "old growth" forest, and marks the first time in more than two decades that the Commonwealth has purchased land containing woods that have remained uncut and undisturbed since before European settlers arrived. Once covering most of the state's 5.2 million acres, fewer than 1,200 acres of old growth forest remain in Massachusetts.

Boasting 2.5 miles along the state's most pristine river system and scenic views of the Berkshire foothills, the Sandisfield land also includes 62-acre Lower Spectacle Pond. One of only two 50-plus acre lakes in the Berkshires with a shoreline both completely undeveloped and – until the state's purchase last week – unprotected, the area had been threatened by potential development of approximately 60 large homes near the lake.

"The state's purchase of this spectacular property ensures its lasting protection and is an example of our prudent investment in the Commonwealth's rare and irreplaceable natural resources," said Governor Patrick.

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“Large blocks of protected land are increasingly challenging to stitch together, but they pay enormous dividends to the citizens of the Commonwealth in terms of the ecological services like clean water they provide, and in terms of the recreational opportunities they create. Connecting two other Department of Conservation and Recreation properties – Otis State Forest to the north and Clam River Flood Control Area to the south, Spectacle Pond Farm forms the crucial link in a roughly 9,000-acre area of protected open space in southern Berkshire County,” Bowles added.

Mass Audubon played a key role in protecting the Sandisfield property - last year purchasing a one-half interest in the property from some members of the Rowley/Hawley family to ensure the land remained undeveloped. The remainder of the family sold the other half share of the land to a developer in January 2007. DCR then brokered a deal to purchase the entire 900-acre parcel, with Mass Audubon agreeing to sell its portion to the Commonwealth at a below market price.

“We are delighted to be able to purchase this beautiful, historic acreage and guarantee its future as public conservation land,” said DCR Commissioner Richard K. Sullivan, Jr. “We are also deeply indebted to the folks at Mass Audubon, without whose help preserving these 900 acres probably would not have been possible.”

“Protecting this significant treasure has been an extraordinary effort, involving considerable risk and complexity,” said Mass Audubon President Laura Johnson. “We’re extremely pleased and grateful that the Commonwealth’s action has ensured that this wonderful land will remain intact for traditional public uses and wildlife in perpetuity. We are very proud to work in close partnership with the Commonwealth.”

The Sandisfield purchase is significant in terms of protecting natural and historic resources, and enhancing outdoor recreational opportunities. The 900 acres are part of the New Marlborough Forest Block – an 82,000-acre, largely roadless region. Interior wooded areas such as this, with few nearby roads or non-forest uses, are known as “core forests,” and only 45 of them are left between Maine and Virginia.

In addition, the frontage on the Clam River (a major tributary of the Farmington River) includes remains of an 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century mill village, and the parcel is home to one of the longest undisturbed remaining portions of the Knox Trail – used by General Henry Knox in the winter of 1776 to bring the cannon from New York’s Fort Ticonderoga to Massachusetts to break the British siege of Boston.

The land also contains an excellent system of hiking and cross-country skiing trails, and has potential for other recreational uses including canoeing, kayaking, primitive camping, mountain biking, horseback riding, fishing, and hunting.

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